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POLICE INVESTIGATE 13 HOSPITAL DEATHS - 16 September 02

Police are investigating 13 deaths of elderly patients who were admitted to the Gosport Hospital in Hampshire, during 1997 and 2000. Their families believe all the deaths to

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when one family called the police in to carry out a coronial inquest into the death of their relative had been unlawfully killed. Since the death of Harold Shipman the Commission for Health Improvement have carried out their own investigations and have expressed concerns as to the prescribing of cocktails of drugs some of which their report has said carry a high risk of excessive sedation and respiratory depression in older patients, leading to death.

Ann Alexander the solicitor representing over 300 relatives of the victims of Harold Shipman said: "Whilst I am now pleased to see that a thorough investigation is taking place, or why this has taken so long. Following Shipman's conviction Alan Milburn the Secretary of State for Health said that he would do everything in his power to bring about change swiftly in anything like this from happening again. Yet here we have another situation where such a tragedy has been raised a considerable time ago yet it would appear that little corrective action took place."

"It is of great concern to read that a police investigation took place in 1998 and that since then there have been a number of other suspicious deaths. This was four years ago and I am surprised to read that the families involved are extremely concerned. There are a number of people who think that they must now be reflecting upon least of all the apparent lack of action during the time and also the time it has taken with regard to looking into the clinical practices of the medical professionals involved. We have seen in the case of Harold Shipman how delays result in avoidable deaths. In all possible circumstances, I sincerely hope that this is not what has happened here."

Reported in The Sunday Times 15th September, 2002.

POLICE are investigating the deaths of 13 elderly hospital patients who relatives believe were given overdoses of powerful drugs, including the painkiller diamorphine.

On Friday Liam Donaldson, the chief medical officer, ordered an audit of the hospital's drug use which will be carried out by the same expert who analysed mortality among patients in the case of Harold Shipman.

Harold Shipman, who was sentenced to life two years ago, is believed to have killed more than 200 people by giving them overdoses of diamorphine, the pure form of heroin that is used in medicine but is lethal in overdose.

All 13 of the Hampshire patients were admitted to Gosport War Memorial hospital between 1997 and 2000 to recover from various operations and treatments. None of their families was told at the time of admission that their relatives were expected to die.

Jane Barton, a GP who was in day-to-day charge of medical care at the hospital until her death in 2000, was referred to the General Medical Council's professional conduct committee last week. A consultant geriatrician and seven nurses are also the subject of complaints about the deaths of patients.

However, there is no suggestion that Barton, who has refused to comment, or any of the other staff who worked on the wards deliberately caused harm to any patient.

Among the cases being probed are the deaths of:

- **Elsie Devine, 88**, who was admitted to the hospital to recover from a kidney infection. She was urged to leave the hospital shortly before she died. They were stunned to discover she had been given large doses of diamorphine.

Leonard Graham, 75, who was recovering from pneumonia. His wife was "told" to ri while a drug dose was administered. He died shortly afterwards.

Betty Rogers, 67, who was recovering from a chest infection. Her daughter was urg having been told her mother was not near death. Fifteen minutes later she received a had died.

Other deaths under investigation include Stanley Carby, 65, Eva Page, 88, and Dulcie

Among those who are helping the police with their inquiries is Jim Ripley, a 76-year-o who was admitted to Gosport War Memorial hospital in April 2000. He narrowly escap falling into a painkiller-induced coma on one of the three wards now under investigati hours for an emergency doctor to arrive after he lost consciousness at hospital. He wa the nearby Haslar hospital where staff soon established he had not had a stroke, as w suspected, but was in an "analgesic coma".

A number of families were advised to take holidays during th eir relatives' last hours. " me to go on holiday? Surely they knew he was going to die," said Dorie Graham, who Leonard died in 2000. She complained to the police more than a year ago.

Code A entered the hospital for rehabilitation after a hip replacement. She v darkened room and heavily sedated, according to Mike Wilson, her son. Wilson consul tried to get her moved to a private hospital. He was then himself rushed into hospital attack and while he was there she died.

The medical notes of Alice Wilkie, 88, record her as having died twice on the same da granddaughter Emily Yeats believes this is because her files were mixed with those of 91, who died hours later. Both received cocktails of painkillers that investigations by t for Health Improvement (CHI) revealed should not have been used together.

A CHI report into the hospital's practice, published in July, criticised the use of diamoi with a strong anaesthetic, and another drug usually used to treat schizophrenia. This report said, "could carry a risk of excessive sedation and respiratory depression in old leading to death".

The CHI was originally asked to investigate the hospital by the police, who had begun investigation into the 1998 death of Richards, after her family alleged she had been u

Although the CHI report said it could not look at any particular death, it found doses c milligrams a day of morphine were being administered through pumps into patients' t Prescriptions for morphine and other potent drugs were regularly written in advance, could administer them unsupervised.

Ian Piper, the chief executive of the Gosport and Fareham primary care trust, which n the hospital, said he could not comment on individual cases. The trust has just sent it proposals to meet the 22 recommendations for change in the CHI report. Standards c hospital had improved, said Piper.

Families of 10 of the dead patients attended a meeting called by Ian Readhead, deput of Hampshire, last week. Police said a file on the affair will be sent to the Crown Prosec this month. The Nursing and Midwifery Council said it was investigating disciplinary pi several nurses.

Donaldson has commissioned Richard Baker, professor of clinical governance at Leice: repeat the statistical analysis he conducted into Shipman's practice.

Donaldson said previous inquiries into patient concerns at Gosport had not establishe patterns of death were "out of line with what would be expected". Baker will seek to a question fully.

Reported in The Times, 16th September 2002.

Families prompt hospital deaths inquiry

FAMILIES are hoping to uncover the truth about the deaths of elderly relatives at a hospital where the Government ordered an investigation.

Sir Liam Donaldson, the Chief Medical Officer, has ordered the inquiry into death rates at the Memorial Hospital in Hampshire.

It is only the second time that he has ordered such an investigation: the first was in 1998 when Sir Liam Shipman, the doctor who killed hundreds of his patients.

Sir Liam said an audit of medical records and interviews with staff would be carried out to see whether "patterns of death were out of line with what would be expected". Hampshire is now investigating whether any criminal intent was involved.

Complaints have been received from up to 13 families of patients who were admitted to the hospital between 1998 and 2000. They fear mistreatment or overdoses of powerful painkillers may have been involved.

"There has to have been something wrong for this many people to complain," said Mrs Maureen Emsworth, Hampshire, whose mother, Dulcie Middleton, 85, died in September 2001.

She said: "I am pleased this has been set up because we have been struggling for the elderly people who are frightened to go into hospital."

An audit of hospital records will be carried out by Richard Baker, a Professor of Clinical Medicine at Leicester University. He conducted an analysis of Shipman's career which led to the closure of the hospital in April 1998.

In July government inspectors criticised the Portsmouth Healthcare NHS Trust, the trust that runs the hospital until April, for excessive use of pain-relieving drugs.

Patients were put at risk, but inspectors would not say whether anyone had died as a result of the treatment.

The inspectors' report was triggered by allegations from the family of Gladys Richards that her mother was unlawfully killed in August 1998.

Professor Baker will draw on medical records, staff rotas, times of death, the amount and condition of each patient who died to establish if there are any links.

Ian Piper, chief executive of the Fareham and Gosport Primary Care Trust, the health trust that oversees the running of the hospital, said: "I sympathise with the relatives. We want to find some answers for these families."

Many changes had been made to procedures at the hospital since 1998, he said.

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